

**The Tale
of the
Wife of
Bath**

Now, sire, quod she, I houde amende al this,
If that me liste, er it were dayes thre;
So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.
But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse,
That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,
Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.
Looke who that is moost vertuous alway,
Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he kan,
And taak hym for the grettest gentil man.
Crist wole, we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,
Nat of oure eldres for hire old richesse,
for thogh they yeve us al hir heritage,
for which we clayme to been of heigh parage,
Yet may they nat biquethe, for nothyng,
To noon of us, hir vertuous lyyng,
That made hem gentil men ycalled be,
And bade us folwen hem in swich degree.
Wel kan the wise poete of florence,
That highte Dant, speken in this sentence;
Lo in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:
ful selde up riseth by his branches smale
Prowesse of man, for God, of his goodnesse,
Wole that of hym we clayme our gentillesse;
for of oure eldres may we nothyng clayme,
But temporel thyng, that man may hurte and
mayme.
Eek every wight woot this as wel as I,
If gentillesse were planted naturelly
Unto a certeyn lynage, doun the lyne,
Pryvee ne apert, than wolde they nevere fyne
To doon of gentillesse the faire office;
They myghte do no vileynye or vice.
Taak fyr, and ber it in the derkeste hous
Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous,
And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;
Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne,
As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde;
His office naturel ay wol it holde,
Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.
NEERE may ye se wel, how that genterye
Is nat annexed to possessioun,
Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun
Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo! in his kynde.
for, God it woot, men may wel often fynde
A lordes sone do shame and vileynye;
And he that wole han pris of his gentrye
for he was boren of a gentil hous,
And hadde his eldres noble and vertuous,
And nyl hymselfen do no gentil dedis,
Ne folwe his gentil auncestre that deed is,
He nys nat gentil, be he duc or ertl;
for vileyns synful dedes make a cherl.
for gentillesse nys but renomee
Of thyne auncestres, for hire heigh bountee,
Which is a strange thyng to thy persone.
Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone;
Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace,
It was nothyng biquethe us with oure place.
Thenketh how noble, as seith Valerius,
Was thilke Tullius Hostilius,
That out of poverté roos to heigh noblesse.

Redeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece,
Ther shul ye seen expres, that it no drede is,
That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis;
And therfore, leewe housbonde, I thus conclude,
Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,
Yet may the hye God, and so hope I,
Grante me grace to lyven vertuously;
Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne
To lyven vertuously and weyve synne.
And theras ye of poverté me repreve,
The hye God, on whom that we bileve,
In wilful poverté chees to lyve his lyf,
And certes, every man, mayden, or wyf,
May understonde that Jhesus, hevене
kyng,
Ne wolde nat chesen vicious lyyng.
Glad poverté is an honeste thyng, certeyn;
This wole Senek and othere clerkes seyn.
Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverté,
I holde hym riche, al hadde he nat a sherte.
He that coveteth is a povere wight,
for he wolde han that is nat in his myght.
But he that noght bath, ne coveteth have,
Is riche, although ye holde hym but a knave.
Verray poverté, it syngeth proprely;
Juvenal seith of poverté myrily:
The povere man, whan he goth by the weye,
Bifore the theves he may synge and pleye.
Poverté is hateful good, and, as I gesse,
A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse;
A greet amender eek of sapience
To hym that taketh it in pacience.
Poverté is this, although it seme alenge;
Possessioun, that no wight wol challenge,
Poverté ful ofte, whan a man is lowe,
Maketh his God, and eek hymself, to knowe.
Poverté a spectacle is, as thynketh me,
Thurgh which he may his verray freendes see.
And therfore, sire, syn that I noght yow greve,
Of my poverté namoore ye me repreve.
Now, sire, of elde ye repreve me;
And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee
Were in no book, ye gentils of honour
Seyn that men sholde an oold wight doon
favour,
And clepe hym fader, for youre gentillesse;
And auctours shal I fynden, as I gesse.
Now ther ye seye that I am foul and old,
Than drede you noght to been a cokewold;
for filthe and elde, also moot I thee,
Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee;
But natheless, syn I knowe youre delit,
I shal fulfillle youre worldly appetit.
Chese now, quod she, oon of thise thynges
tweye:
To han me foul and old til that I deye,
And be to yow a trewe humble wyf,
And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;
Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
And take youre aventure of the repair
That shal be to youre hous, bycause of me,
Or in som oother place, may wel be;
Now chese yourselven, whether that yow liketh.

HIS knyght avyseth hym and sore
siketh,
But atte laste he seyde in this manere:
My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
I put me in youre wise governance;
Cheseth youreself which may be moost
plesance,
And moost honour to yow and me also;
I do no fors the wheither of the two;
for as yow liketh it suffiseth me.

HANNE have I gete of yow maistrie,
quod she,
Syn I may chese, and governe as me
lest?

Ye, certes, wyf, quod he, I holde it best.
Kys me, quod she, we be no lenger wrothe;
for, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe,
This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.
I prey to God that I moote sterven wood,
But I to yow be al so good and trewe,
As evere was wyf, syn that the world was
newe.

And, but I be tomore as fair to seene
As any lady, emperice, or queene,
That is bitwix the est and eek the west,
Dooth with my lyf & deth right as yow lest.
Cast up the curtyn, looke how that it is.

And whan the knyght saugh verrailly al this,
That she so fair was, and so yong therto,
for joye he hente hire in his armes two,
his herte bathed in a bath of blisse;
A thousand tyme arewe he gan hire hisse.
And she obeyed hym in every thyng
That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.

AND thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende,
In parfit joye; and Jhesu Crist us sende
housbondes mecke, yonge, and fresch
abedde,
And grace toverbyde hem that we wedde.
And eek, I praye Jhesu, shorte hir lyves
That wol nat be governed by hir wyves;
And olde and angry nygards of dispence,
God sende hem soone verray pestilence!

Here endeth the Wyves Tale of Bath.

HERE BIGYNNETH THE FRERES TALE

WHILOM ther was dwell-
ynge in my contree
An erchedekene, a man
of heigh degree,
That boldely dide ex-
cucioun
In punysshynge of
fornicioun,
Of wichecraft, and
eek of bawderye,
Of diffamacioun, and avowtrye,
Of chirchereves, and of testaments,
Of contractes, and of lakke of sacraments,
And eek of many another maner cryme,
Which nedeth nat rehercen for this tyme;

The prologe of the freres Tale

HIS worthy lymytour,
this noble frere,
he made alway a maner
louryng chiere
Upon the Somnour,
but for honestee
No vileyns word as yet
to hym spak he.
But atte laste he seyde
unto the Wyf,

Dame, quod he, God yeve yow right good lyf!
Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
In scole matere greet difficultee.
Ye han seyde muchel thyng right wel, I seye;
But dame, heere as we ryden by the weye,
As nedeth nat to speken but of game,
And lete auctoritees, on Goddes name,
To prechyng, and to scole eek of clergie.
And if it lyke to this compaignye,
I wol yow of a Somnour telle a game.
Pardee, ye may wel knowe by the name,
That of a Somnour may no good be sayd;
I praye that noon of you be yvele apayd.
A Somnour is a renner up and doun
With mandemens for fornicacioun,
And is ybet at every townes ende.

ARE hoost tho spak, A, sire, ye
sholde be hende
And curteys, as a man of youre
estaat;

In compaignye we wol have no debaat;
Tellethe youre tale, and lat the Somnour be.
Nay, quod the Somnour, lat hym seye to me
Whatso hym list; whan it comth to my lot,
By God! I shal hym quiten every grot!
I shal hym tellen which a greet honour
It is to be a flaterynge lymytour;
And his office I shal hym telle, ywis.
Oure hoost answerde, Pees! namoore of
this!

And after this he seyde unto the frere,
Tel forth youre tale, leewe maister deere.
Here endeth the prologe of the frere.

Of usure, and of symonye also,
But certes, leechours dide he grettest wo;
They sholde synge, if that they were hent;
And smale tytheres weren foule yshent;
If any persone wolde upon hem pleyne
Ther myghte asterte hym no pecunyal peyne.
for smale tithes, and for smal offrynges,
He made the peple pitously to synge;
forer the bisschop caughte hem with his hook,
They weren in the erchedekenes book.
Thanne hadde he, thurgh his jurisdiocioun,
Power to doon on hem correccioun.
He hadde a Somnour redy to his hond,
A slyer boye was noon in Engelond;
for subtilly he hadde his espaille,